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Saudi Arabia: Two juveniles executed by Saudi authorities among a group of five

Two men who were juveniles at the time of their alleged crimes were beheaded by Saudi Arabian authorities yesterday (Sunday), Amnesty International revealed today. The death sentences against Sultan Bin Sulayman Bin Muslim al-Muwallad, a Saudi Arabian, and 'Issa bin Muhammad 'Umar Muhammad, a Chadian, were imposed after grossly unfair trial proceedings.

The two men were beheaded, along with three other men, after being convicted of a number of offences committed when they were 17 years old, including the abduction and rape of children, theft, and consumption of alcohol and drugs. These offences had, according to the judgement, amounted to "corruption on earth", a charge that can carry the death penalty even when the offences do not result in lethal consequences.

"Yesterday's beheadings are a deplorable addition to Saudi Arabia's grim tally of executions," said Philip Luther, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme. "It is cruel and inhumane to put anyone to death, but it is particularly outrageous to do so when the executions take place after grossly unfair procedures and when they take the lives of individuals accused of committing crimes when they were still minors."

The men were among seven arrested in 2004 and held incommunicado at police stations in Madina, where they were allegedly beaten in an attempt to make them confess. Four years later, in February 2008, the Madina General Court sentenced five of them to death after a trial that was held in secret. Their sentences were upheld by the Court of Cassation in Makkah in July 2008.

Two other men in the same case – Bilal Bin Muslih Bin Jabir al-Muwallad, a Saudi Arabian, and Ahmad Hamid Muhammad Sabir, a Chadian, who were just 15 and 13 respectively at the time of their alleged offences – were sentenced to "severe flogging" on the same charges, in addition to terms of imprisonment. Specifically, they will receive 1,500 and 1,250 severe lashes respectively, administered in instalments at 10-day intervals in public at the scene of the offences. Saudi Arabia is a state party to the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which expressly prohibits the use of punishments such as flogging.

Due to the strict secrecy of the criminal justice system, it is not possible to know how many of those convicted of crimes committed when they were under 18 – have been put to death in Saudi Arabia, but Amnesty International is aware of at least eight other juveniles who are feared to be on death row. They include Rizana Nafeek, a Sri Lankan national who was 17 at the time of the alleged murder for which she was sentenced to death following her arrest in 2005. They may also include Sultan Kohail, a 16-year-old Canadian national who is facing trial in an adult court on murder charges, along with his brother Mohamed Kohail, aged 22, who has been sentenced to death.

Saudi Arabia is also a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which expressly prohibits the execution of juveniles. Saudi Arabian officials have maintained that they comply with this obligation because they do not execute children. In fact, the Convention prohibits executions for crimes committed while a person is under 18, regardless of when the sentence is carried out.

Amnesty International has repeatedly raised the cases of these seven men with the Saudi Arabian authorities in the past year.

Background

These executions increase to 36 the number of people executed in Saudi Arabia this year. In 2008, a total of 102 people were killed by Saudi authorities.

Trial proceedings usually take place behind closed doors without adequate legal representation, and invariably fall short of international fair trial standards. Both children and adults are often convicted on the basis of "confessions" obtained under duress, including torture or other ill-treatment during incommunicado detention.

In a recent report on the use of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, Amnesty International highlighted the extensive use of the death penalty as well as the disproportionately high number of executions of foreign nationals from developing countries. For further information please see Saudi Arabia: Affront to Justice: Death Penalty in Saudi Arabia (Index: MDE 23/027/2008), issued on 14 October 2008:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/saudi-arabia-executions-target-foreign-nationals-20081014>